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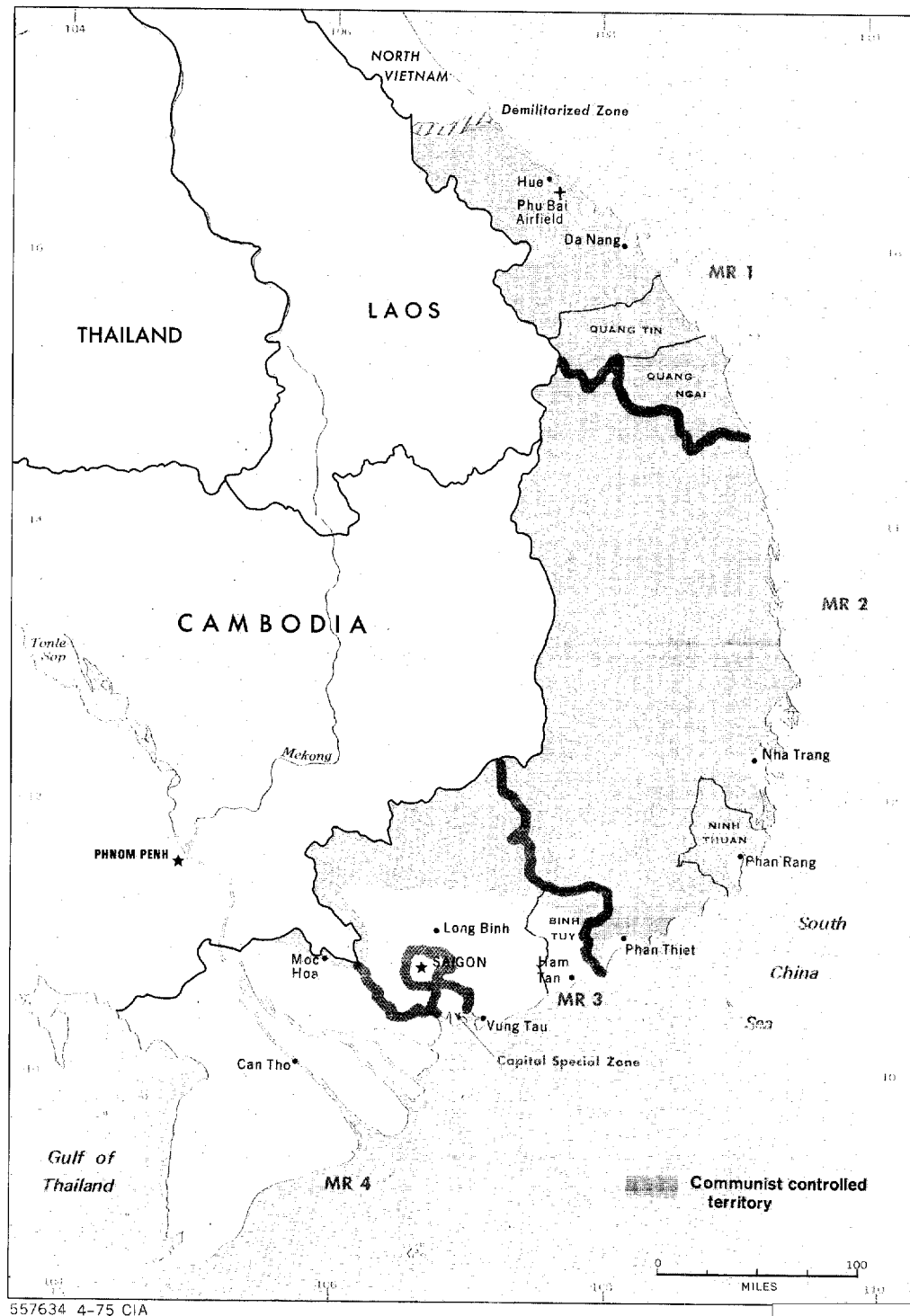
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SOUTH VIETNAM

President Thieu's obvious intention to remain in power has produced mounting dissatisfaction in both military and civilian circles, but as yet there is no firm evidence of a serious move to force his ouster or resignation.

In a limited sampling of Vietnamese reaction, the US embassy reports that most of those interviewed are taking a wait-and-see attitude. They welcome the departure of Prime Minister Khiem, but question whether lower house speaker Can is capable of the difficult task Thieu has assigned him of forming a new cabinet. Although Can is a respected and intelligent politician, he is a close associate of Thieu and has few contacts among the military. As a national leader, most regard Can as a lightweight, and they question whether he can persuade an impressive group to join the government.

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Some people have been arrested on vague charges of coup plotting, while others have lost their draft deferments and are being sent to the front lines. The labor force, including government bureaucrats, is reluctant to speak out against Thieu in the wake of rumors that Viet Cong agents are now trying to spread confusion among the people.

Military men are equally reluctant to move against Thieu, fearing that any unsuccessful coup would bring disgrace to them and reprisals against their families. Religious factions, especially the Catholics, do not want to take any action that would help the communists. Thus, [redacted] so long as Thieu retains the loyalty of a few high-level military officers and the police, his removal from office will not be an easy task.

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There was virtually no fighting in the provinces near Saigon over the weekend. Early this morning about 60 rounds of communist rocket and mortar fire struck the Nha Be oil depot several miles south of the capital, causing little damage. The communists threaten several key urban centers and the major highway linking the delta with Saigon, but no significant battles have developed in Military Region 3. In the delta, the level of communist-initiated activity increased somewhat over the weekend, but was limited to shellings and light ground probes of government positions.

Officials in the delta are pleased with their newly adopted blocking tactics and with the increased and more effective air support. Regional military officials seem convinced that the North Vietnamese 4th Division, which has concentrated its regiments near Can Tho City, must soon make its move or risk losing its combat effectiveness. Some officials feel that if the communists do not make a successful bid against the Can Tho defenses in the next few days, they will have to fall back. Although the government's army units defending Can Tho have not been particularly aggressive in breaking up the communist threat, there has been constant contact, and daily air and artillery strikes have probably inflicted continuing losses on communist units.

The South Vietnamese have reinforced their forces defending Moc Hoa, a tiny provincial capital just south of the Cambodian border in the northern delta, against expected attacks from elements of both the North Vietnamese 3rd and 5th divisions. Here too, the communists have been slow in getting under way, and their forces are being struck hard by government air and artillery. At the present time, the balance of forces favors the government, and some officials feel this battlefield could be the first big test of the resolve of Saigon's forces in the remaining third of the country.

The commander of the South Vietnamese marine division, which was recently evacuated from Da Nang, is now regrouping his units at Vung Tau along the coast. Of the

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three brigades being reassembled and rearmed, one is almost at full strength and is considered combat-ready. This brigade will soon move closer to Saigon to bolster the confidence of the population in the capital. The other two brigades are at about half strength, but one should be operational--although understrength--by late this week.

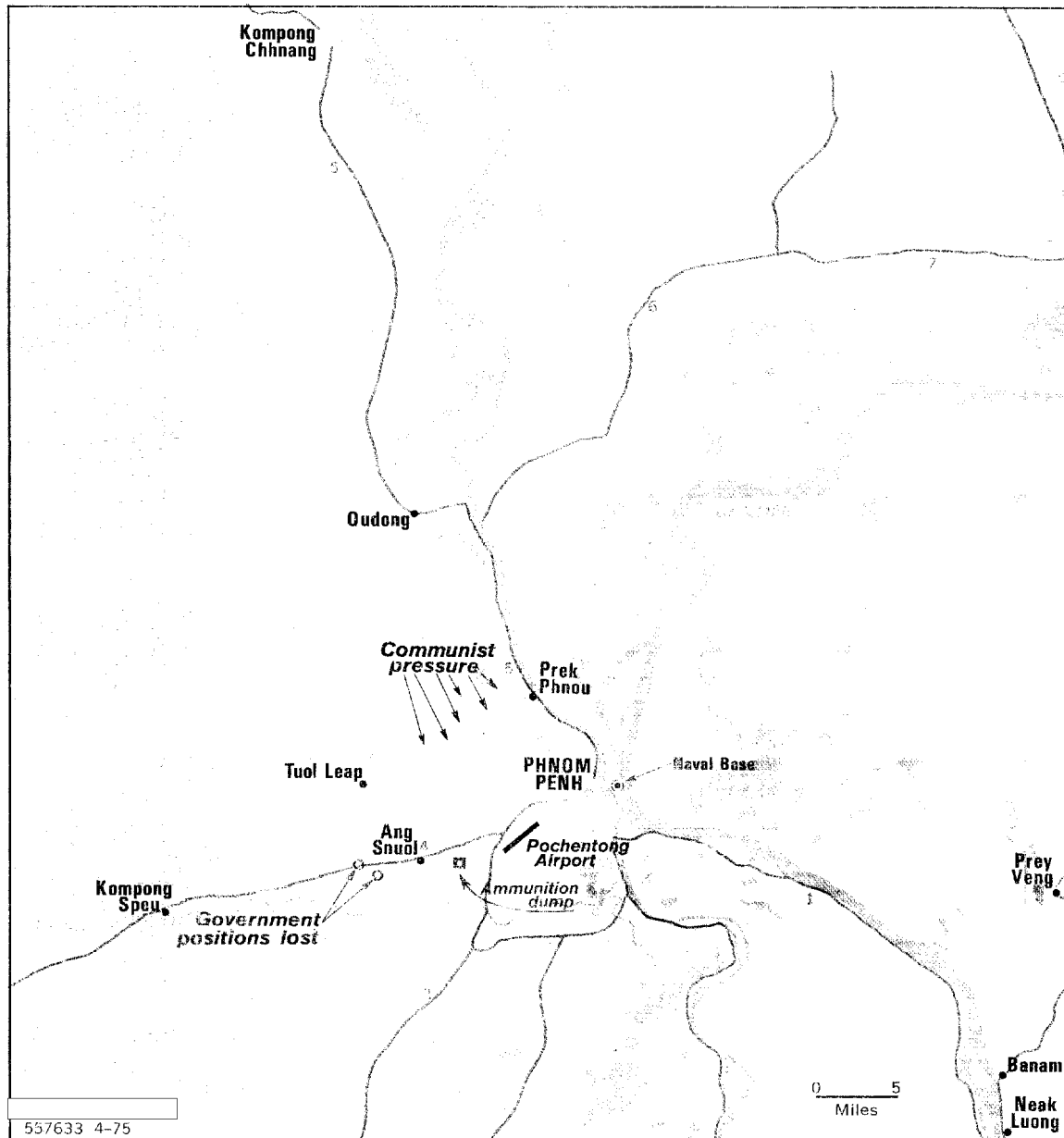
Parts of the airborne brigade that were brought out of the northern provinces have been resting and refitting at Long Binh. One battalion was sent on April 4 to reinforce government units at Phan Rang in Ninh Thuan Province. The government is still holding the small enclaves at Phan Rang and Phan Thiet, largely because the North Vietnamese have been slow to occupy these weakly defended areas of southern Military Region 2. There have also been reports that the communists have not yet moved into Nha Trang in force; whatever remains of Saigon's military presence there, however, is weak and ineffective.

The remainder of the South Vietnamese 2nd Division, which fled from Quang Ngai and Quang Tin provinces in Military Region 1, is now in Binh Tuy Province. The commander is encountering difficulties in reorganizing the division's 4,000 or so troops because they have been reluctant to turn in their weapons. Some troops have been stealing and looting in the provincial capital of Ham Tan, a sea-coast city deluged with military personnel and civilians arriving by sea from the northern provinces.

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CAMBODIA: Phnom Penh Area



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CAMBODIA

The tempo of combat activity in most sectors around Phnom Penh increased over the weekend. Northwest of the capital, the government's efforts to re-establish its defense perimeter along the northern dike, four miles north of Pochentong Airport, have met heavy communist resistance. As of early this morning, one government unit had been forced to give ground and communist troops are now reported within three miles of the airfield.

Insurgent gunners fired over 80 rockets and 105-mm. howitzer rounds against the airfield over the weekend, heavily damaging three C-123 transport planes and lightly damaging a fourth. An increased level of artillery and rocket attacks against the airfield is expected as the communists attempt to stop airlift operations. There is no apparent immediate threat of a major ground attack against the airfield.

North of Phnom Penh, additional ground was lost along Route 51 west of Prek Phnou. Government positions along Route 5 received attacks by fire, including 105-mm. howitzer fire from the east bank of the Tonle Sap River. Renewed pressure there may presage a major communist push southward toward the Chrouy Chang War Naval Base. According to the US defense attaché in Phnom Penh, government defenses in the area are weak, troop morale is low, and a further increase in enemy pressure probably could not be countered.

Over the weekend, the situation deteriorated further on Phnom Penh's western defenses. Communist pressure along Route 4 has forced the government to abandon two outposts, with the loss of much equipment. A new defense line has been established near Ang Snuol, less than six miles from the army's main ammunition depot south of the highway. An assistant US army attaché who has visited the area reports that renewed insurgent attacks could easily result in a further pullback and the loss of two more miles of Route 4, substantially increasing the threat to the ammunition depot and Pochentong.

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More and more reports of deteriorating morale are beginning to surface in Phnom Penh. Although many unit commanders have indicated that they are determined to hold out against the communists as long as ammunition lasts, the defense attaché characterized personnel at the military high command and other major unit headquarters as being in a state of "suspended animation" yesterday. The apparent lack of direction displayed at high levels could signal the unraveling of an already weakened command-and-control structure.

A steady increase of insurgent pressure is expected against Phnom Penh's defenses within the next few days--especially along the Bassac River in the southeast--as additional communist forces deploy closer to the capital. The defense perimeter is vulnerable in most areas and could collapse against a determined enemy thrust.

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NATIONALIST CHINA

President Chiang Kai-shek's death on Saturday, following several years of deteriorating health, will not lead to any immediate dramatic policy changes by the Taipei government.

Vice President Yen Chia-kan was sworn in as president yesterday, but he will be largely a figurehead leader. The real power will rest with the late President's eldest son, Premier Chiang Ching-kuo, who gradually assumed leadership after his father became seriously ill in 1972.

The main points of Premier Chiang's domestic and foreign policies have closely paralleled those of his father, and there is little reason to expect dramatic changes now. Since the younger Chiang assumed effective control of the government, there has been no weakening of the Nationalists' staunch anti-communist stand or their claim to represent all of China. In the past, Chiang has shown no sign of willingness to reach an accommodation with Peking after his father's death. There is little likelihood that this attitude will change soon.

Premier Chiang has, however, placed less emphasis in recent years on the "return-to-the-mainland" theme with which his father was so closely identified. He has also attempted to obtain greater participation in the government by native Taiwanese.

Taipei's ties with the US are still a key concern to the Nationalists. Premier Chiang can be expected to try to gain reassurance from Washington of its commitments to Taiwan, especially in the light of recent developments in Indochina. Foreign Minister Shen Chang-huan approached the US ambassador in Taipei on Sunday with a "private" request for "some reassuring gesture" from President Ford regarding US "solidarity" with the Taipei government.

In another area important to the Nationalists, Premier Chiang will continue efforts to expand foreign trade and to retain trade ties with those countries that have severed diplomatic relations with Taipei.

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IRAQ-SYRIA

Relations between Baghdad and Damascus are seriously strained again. Recent strident accusations of meddling in each other's affairs have fanned the latent hostility between the two Baath Party governments.

The latest charge was aired yesterday by Baghdad. According to the Iraqi press, the government has called for an urgent meeting of Arab foreign ministers to discuss its claim that Damascus is diverting waters from the Euphrates River. This call follows a well-orchestrated Iraqi propaganda campaign over the past two weeks charging Syria with an "inhuman" restriction of the river's waters, threatening the livelihood of Iraqi peasants.

The water is very low along the portion of the Euphrates that flows through Iraq. Syrian officials, commenting to the US embassy, have disclaimed responsibility, however, and place the blame for the inadequate flow on Turkey. The Syrians claim Turkey is diverting water to its own reservoir.

There are signs that Syria may be responsible for Iraq's water-supply problem, perhaps in retaliation for Iraq's apparent involvement in a recent effort either to overthrow or to undermine the regime of President Asad. Last month, shortly before Baghdad began to accuse Damascus publicly of tampering with the Euphrates, Syrian authorities rounded up 250 to 300 local Baath Party members on charges of conspiring with Iraq to oust Asad.

Many of the Syrians detained are from an area in northern Syria where pro-Iraqi sentiment is traditionally strong.

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In February, Baghdad publicly accused Syria of aiding the Kurdish rebels and later attacked Damascus for supporting the US step-by-step approach to peace negotiations. The Syrians followed by asking Baghdad to withdraw its cultural attaché from Damascus for "carrying out activities which had no connection with his duties."

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COLOMBIA

Colombian Foreign Minister Lievano, whose visit to Washington begins today, will lay the groundwork for President Lopez' visit in late summer or early fall.

In his conversations in Washington, Lievano's principal interest will be to protect Colombia's privilege of free transit through the Panama Canal under the new treaty being negotiated between the US and Panama. He will also emphasize his--and President Lopez'--desire for strong inter-American organizations in his talks with US officials and officials of the Organization of American States.

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